

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8471

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y FOR MRN

EO 11652: NA

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SUBJ: MRS GANDHI'S SOUTHERN TOUR

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER GANDHI MADE A THREE-DAY SWING THROUGH KERALA AND TAMIL NADU SEPTEMBER 13-15. IN MAJOR SPEECHES AT TRIVANDRUM, NAGERCOIL, MADURAI, AND COIMBATORE, SHE REPEATED MANY OF HER FAVORITE THEMES. HER SHARP ATTACKS ON THE OPPOSITION PARTIES WERE REMINISCENT OF PAST ELECTION TOUR SPEECHES. SHE CLAIMED THAT DISRUPTIVE ELEMENTS WERE STILL AT WORK, DECLARED THAT SEPARATISM WILL NOT BE TOLERATED AT ANY COST, AND STRONGLY DEFENDED THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS. SHE ALSO SHARPLY CRITICIZED THE DMK FOR ITS ADVOCACY OF CASTE, LANGUAGE, AND SEPARATISM. THE PRIME MINISTER REFUSED, HOWEVER, TO BE DRAWN OUT ON THE QUESTION OF HOLDING ELECTIONS. ALTHOUGH THE PURPOSE OF MRS GANDHI'S TOUR WAS OSTENSIBLY TO OPEN A NW RAIL LINE IN KERALA AND TO VIEW THE DROUGHT-AFFECTED REGIONS OF TAMIL NADU, IT IS LIKELY THAT HER REAL INTENT WAS TO

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TEST THE POLITICAL WATER IN THE SOUTH AND TO PUMP SOME

LIFE INTO THE CONGRESS ORGANIZATION IN THE TWO STATES WHERE SUPPORT FOR THE PARTY IS WEAKEST. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

1. THROUGHOUT HER SPEECHES IN KERALA AND TAMIL NADU, MRS GANDHI REITERATED HER FAVORITE THEME THAT "DISRUPTIVE ELEMENTS" WERE STILL AT WORK IN THE COUNTRY. IF THERE WAS A "LITTLE SLACKENING," THESE ELEMENTS WOULD RAISE THEIR HEADS AGAIN AND SPREAD RUMORS AND FALSE PROPAGANDA. SHE CLAIMED THAT THOSE WHO HAD BEEN RELEASED FROM DETENTION WERE STILL SPEAKING THE SAME OLD LANGUAGE "AS IF NOTHING HAS CHANGED IN INDIA." SHE ALSO WARNED THAT THE ALL-INDIA AGITATION HAD NOT BEEN WITHDRAWN YET AND URGED CITIZENS TO BE VIGILANT.

2. MRS GANDHI DESCRIBED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THE GREAT PROGRESS THAT HAD BEEN ACHIEVED IN INDUSTRY, AGRICULTURE AND OTHER FIELDS SINCE THE PROCLAMATION OF THE EMERGENCY. SHE SAID THIS HAD BEEN POSSIBLE BECAUSE "THERE WAS A SENSE OF UNITY, BECAUSE THERE WAS A FEELING OF RESPONSIBILITY AND DISCIPLINE AMONG THE PEOPLE AND BECAUSE WE DID NOT ALLOW FISSIPARIOUS TENDENCIES OR USELESS AGITATIONS TO CONTINUE TO HARM THE COUNTRY." SHE DECRIED SEPARATISM IN ANY FORM, SAYING THAT SHE WOULD USE ALL THE POWERS AT HER COMMAND TO PUT DOWN SEPARATIST MOVEMENTS WHATEVER THE COST. THE PRIME MINISTER ALSO SAID: "ONLY IF THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT IS STRONG AND THE WHOLE NATION IS STRONG, ALL THE STATES CAN GO FORWARD. THE CENTRE WILL THEN BE IN A BETTER POSITION TO HELP THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING OR THOSE WHO ARE BACKWARD OR WEAKER."

3. ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS DURING HER TOUR OF TAMIL NADU, MRS GANDHI DEVOTED HER REMARKS ALMOST ENTIRELY TO CONDEMNING THE DIVISIVE SLOGANEERING OF A CERTAIN POLITICAL PARTY (I.E., THE DMK). SHE CALLED ON THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE TO COMBAT THE "RIDICULOUS" SLOGANS OF THE DMK AND CONCENTRATE ON MAKING UP FOR THE TIME LOST DURING THE ERSTWHILE REGIME. SHE SHARPLY CRITICIZED THE PARTY'S PROPAGATION OF SLOGANS ON THE ISSUES OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CASTE, LANGUAGE, AUTONOMY AND SEPARATISM, SAYING: "WE HAVE NOT ONLY ASSURED THE PEOPLE BUT WE HAVE PROVED BY OUR POLICY AND ACTION THAT WE DO NOT WANT TO FORCE ANY LANGUAGE ON ANY PEOPLE. BUT WE WANT ONLY TO ENCOURAGE BY ALL WAYS POSSIBLE THE REGIONAL LANGUAGES. HENCE, ANTI-HINDI SLOGANS ARE ENTIRELY WITHOUT SUBSTANCE." CONGEN MADRAS REPORTS THAT AT ONLY ONE POINT (DURING A SPEECH AT MADURAI) DID THE PRIME MINISTER SPECIFICALLY

REFER TO THE DMK BY NAME. IN THE CONTEXT OF PRAISING THE PAST GOVERNMENTS OF TAMIL NADU, SHE SAID: "UNFORTUNATELY, IN THE LAST FE YEARS THERE WAS ANOTHER GOVERNMENT--THE DMK GOVERNMENT-- AND THE STANDARD OF ADMINISTRATION FELL VERY MUCH. FOR THE FIRST TIME TAMIL NADU LAGGED BEHIND."

4. WHILE MRS GANDHI MAY HAVE LIMITED HERSELF TO ONE REFERENCE TO THE DMK BY NAME, MINISTER OF STATE FOR HOME AFFAIRS OM MEHTA FELT NO SUCH INHIBITIONS. IN A SPEECH AT MADURAI IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING HERS, MEHTA CASTIGATED THE DMK FOR ITS MISRULE AND MISUSE OF POWER AND EXPLAINED WHY IT HAD TO BE DISSOLVED. HE STATED THAT NOT ONLY THE SARKARIA COMMISSION, BUT ALSO THE CBI WAS INVOLVED IN BRINGING THE DMK'S MISDEEDS TO LIGHT.

5. ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS, THE PRIME MINISTER DECLARED THAT NOTHING WAS BEING DONE HASTILY AND THAT THERE HAD BEEN A NATIONWIDE DEBATE ON THE PROPOSED CHANGES. SHE SAID THAT VARIOUS RIGHTS, PRIVILEGES, AND FREEDOMS HAD BEEN GUARANTEED TO THE PEOPLE UNDER THE CONSTITUTION BUT "YOU AND I KNOW THAT THE VAST MAJORITY OF OUR PEOPLE COULD NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR RIGHTS UNDER THE CONSTITUTION BECAUSE OF THE POWERFUL INTERESTS WHICH DID NOT WANT THEM TO DO SO." THE DEMAND "THAT THE CONSTITUTION BE CHANGED, THAT MAJOR STRUCTURAL CHANGES BE MADE IN THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND ENTIRE SYSTEM" HAD NOT COME FROM THE CONGRESS BUT FROM THE OPPOSITION. YET, WHEN "MUCH Milder CHANGES" WERE PROPOSED TO THE CONSTITUTION THERE WAS A HUE AND CRY THAT "WE ARE BEING ANTI-DEMOCRATIC." AS FOR THE INSTRUMENT TO EFFECT THESE CHANGES, MRS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GANDHI DECLARED: "THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE CAN ONLY BE HEARD THROUGH THE PARLIAMENT. ONLY PARLIAMENT COULD EFFECT THESE CHANGES. THEREFORE PARLIAMENT IS SUPREME."

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NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01

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6. THE PRIME MINISTER WAS ASKED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE IN KERALA ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR HOLDING ELECTIONS IN THE STATE. IN RESPONSE, SHE REPORTEDLY SHOT BACK:

"DO YOU THINK THAT I SHOULD ANNOUNCE IT TO YOU FIRST"

7. WE GATHER THAT FOR THE MOST PART MRS GANDHI CONFINED HER REMARKS TO DOMESTIC ISSUES SUCH AS DROUGHT RELIEF, CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES AND THE DMK. HOWEVER, IN HER SPEECH AT MADURAI (WHICH WAS ATTENDED BY A FSL FROM CONGEN MADRAS) SHE MADE ONE REFERENCE TO EXTERNAL THREATS. IN PRAISING THE GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE INDIAN PEOPLE, SHE SAID: "WE FIND MANY COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD DO NOT LIKE IT (INDIAN SELF-RELIANCE). SO WE ARE SUBJECT TO PRESSURE AND EXTERNAL DANGER AND ALSO INTERNAL DISTURBANCE. UNFORTUNATELY, THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO DO NOT LIKE US TO PROGRESS."

8. AT COIMBATORE, WHERE SHE DELIVERED HER FINAL SPEECH, MRS GANDHI STATED THAT THE FOUR-POINT PROGRAM OF THE YOUTH CONGRESS WAS THE "VERY BASE" OF THE 20 POINT PROGRAM. THE SANJAY GANDHI PROGRAM WAS NOT ONLY FOR INDIA, BUT WAS GAINING IMPORTANCE ALL OVER THE WORLD.

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9. COMMENT: THE OSTENSIBLE PURPOSE OF MRS GANDHI'S HECTIC SWING THROUGH THE SOUTH WAS TO OPEN A NEW RAIL LINE IN KERALA AND TO INSPECT THE DROUGHT-AFFECTED AREAS OF TAMIL NADU. HOWEVER, THE PACE OF HER

TRAVELS (AT ONE POINT, HSE ADDRESSED FIVE FUNCTIONS IN AS MANY HOURS) AND THE FACT THAT SHE DID MUCH OF THE TRIP BY ROAD RATHER THAN HELICOPTER REMINDED MANY OBSERVERS OF SOME OF HER CAMPAIGN TRIPS IN THE PAST. THE PRIME MINISTER RECEIVED A GREAT DEAL OF EXPOSURE IN THE PRESS AND IN PUBLIC, AND THERE WAS A LOT OF "PRESSING OF THE FLESH." THE REAL INTENT OF HER WHIRLWIND TRIP, HOWEVER, WAS MORE LIKELY THE NEED TO TEST THE POLITICA WATER IN THE SOUTH AND TO PUMP SOME LIFE INTO THE CONGRESS ORGANIZATION IN THE TWO STATES WHERE SUPPORT FOR THE PARTY IS WEAKEST.

10. IN THIS CONTEXT, IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT MRS GANDHI'S HOPES FOR BROAD PUBLIC EXPOSURE MAY HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT DAMPENED. CONGEN MADRAS REPORTS THAT THE TAMIL NADU PCC HAD DONE ITS UTMOST TO BRING OUT THE CROWDS TO WELCOME THE PRIME MINSTER. HOWEVER, INSTEAD OF THE ONE MILLION TURNOUT PREDICTED BY TNPCC LEADERS FOR THE MADURAI RALLY, ONLY ABOUT 50,000 ACTUALLY SHOWED UP, AND THESE WERE CONSPICUOUSLY LACKING IN ENTHUSIASM. DESPITE THIS SHORTFALL, THE NON-DMK AND PRO-CONGRESS (R) PRESS PLAYED UP THE AFFAIR TO THE HILT. IN PRINT, THE VISIT LOOKED LIKE A TRIUMPH, AND THE PRIME MINISTER DID IN FACT ESTABLISH SOME RAPPORT WITH THE RURAL PEOPLE, BUT IN FACT THE DEPTH OF SUPPORT DEMONSTRATED FOR THE CONGRESS (R), AT LEAST AS REPORTED BY AN EYEWITNESS AT THE MADURAI RALLY, APPEARED TO BE VERY SHALLOW. AT LEAST AS FAR AS THE TAMIL NADU CONGRE X MACHINE IS CONCERNED, IT APPEARS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT WILL BE OF QUESTIONABLE LONG-RANGE HELP TO THE PARTY IN ITS EFFORTS TO PULL ITSELF OUT OF THE DOLDRUMS.

11. ONE INTERPRETATION OF MRS GANDHI'S REMAKRS ABOUT THE EMERGENCY AND THE OPPOSITION IS THAT SHE SEES LITTLE IN THE POLITICAL SITUATION TO JUSTIFY A MAJOR LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RELAXATION. INDEED, SHE REPEATEDLY EMPHASIZED THE FAILURE OF THE OPPOSITION TO SHOW ANY SIGN OF GENUINE CHANGE (OR REPENTANCE) AND THE NEED TO KEEP THE PRES-SURE ON IF FURTHER ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROGRESS WAS TO BE ACHIEVED.
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